

Message Text

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FROM CHARGE

E.O. 11652: NA
TAGS: SPOP
SUBJ: AMBASSADOR'S ROLE IN DEALING WITH PRESSING GLOBAL PROBLEMS-
POPULATION GROWTH AND ADEQUATE FOOD PRODUCTION

REF: STATE 107370

1. THE PRESENT PREOCCUPATION OF LEBANON'S TOP LEADERSHIP WITH THE IMMEDIATE PROBLEMS OF SECURITY AND THE REESTABLISHMENT OF THE GOVERNMENT'S CONTROL THROUGHOUT LEBANON HAS MADE IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR THEM TO FOCUS ON KEY LONG-RANGE PROBLEMS OF RAPID POPULATION GROWTH AND ADEQUATE FOOD PRODUCTION. HOWEVER, AID REPS HAVE HELD SEVERAL DISCUSSIONS ON THESE SUBJECTS WITH OFFICIALS OF THE COUNCIL FOR DEVELOPMENT AND RECONSTRUCTION (CDR), THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, AND A NUMBER OF SEMI-AUTONOMOUS SATELLITE AGENCIES SUCH AS THE GREEN PLAN AND THE ANIMAL PRODUCTION OFFICE. THE FOLLOWING BRIEF COMMENTS ARE BASED LARGELY ON THESE TALKS.

2. AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT. LEBANON IS A NET IMPORTER OF FOOD AND WILL REMAIN SO. ITS BASIC PROBLEMS OF LIMITED RESOURCES ARE FURTHER COMPLICATED BY INADEQUATE GOVERNMENT PLANNING AND THE PRESENT POLITICAL UNCERTAINTIES. THE FIGHTING THROUGHOUT

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THE COUNTRY IN 1975-76 REDUCED AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION TO APPROXIMATELY 60 PERCENT OF ITS PRE-WAR LEVELS. MANY FARMS, IRRIGATION SYSTEMS, ORCHARDS AND ANIMAL HERDS WERE DESTROYED IN THE FIGHTING. ALTHOUGH SOME PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE IN REBUILDING THE AGRICULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE, ONLY POULTRY AND EGG PRODUCTION ARE APPROACHING PRE-WAR LEVELS.

3. THE GOL MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, NEVER A VERY EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATION, WAS COMPLETELY PARALYZED DURING THE FIGHTING AND HAS NOT ASSUMED A STRONG ROLE IN REVIVING THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR. A NUMBER OF SEMI-AUTONOMOUS GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS, HOWEVER, HAVE DONE AND ARE CONTINUING TO DO EFFECTIVE WORK. THE GREEN PLAN ORGANIZATION, WHICH IS RESPONSIBLE FOR LAND RECLAMATION, ACCESS ROADS AND SMALL IRRIGATION PROJECTS, HAS AGAIN BEGUN TO FUNCTION. THE ORGANIZATION ESTIMATES THAT THERE ARE 325,000 HECTARES UNDER CULTIVATION IN LEBANON, OF WHICH 50,000 ARE IRRIGATED AND 15,000 ARE RECLAIMED LAND. PLANS CALL FOR AN ANNUAL RECLAMATION RATE OF 3,000 HECTARES. BECAUSE THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR, LIKE ALL OTHER SECTORS OF THE LEBANESE ECONOMY, IS DOMINATED BY PRIVATE INITIATIVE, LEBANON'S TRADITIONAL EXPORTS OF FRUITS AND VEGETABLES CAN BE EXPECTED TO RETURN TO PRE-WAR LEVELS AS INDIVIDUAL FARMERS REBUILD THEIR FARMS AND ORCHARDS. ON THE OTHER HAND, THERE ARE LIKELY TO BE CONTINUING DEFICITS OF FROM 80 TO 100 PERCENT IN DOMESTIC PRODUCTION OF SUCH BASIC ITEMS AS MEAT, GRAINS, SUGAR AND OTHER STAPLES. UNECONOMIC CROPS, SUCH AS TOBACCO, ARE SUPPORTED BY GOVERNMENT SUBSIDIES FOR POLITICAL REASONS AND THIS PRACTICE IS LIKELY TO CONTINUE UNTIL A MORE PROFITABLE CROP CAN BE INTRODUCED.

5. POPULATION GROWTH. LEBANON IS ONE OF THE MORE DENSELY POPULATED COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD AND HAS A POPULATION GROWTH RATE ESTIMATED AT 2.5PCT. ANNUALLY. ALTHOUGH THERE HAS BEEN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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NO OFFICIAL CENSUS SINCE 1932, FOR POLITICAL REASONS, LATEST ESTIMATES GIVE A POPULATION OF APPROXIMATELY 2.9 MILLION. BECAUSE OF THE COMPLEX CONFESSIONAL NATURE OF LEBANESE SOCIETY, THERE IS NO GOVERNMENT FAMILY PLANNING POLICY, ALTHOUGH THE BETTER-EDUCATED MEMBERS OF ALL CONFESSIONAL GROUPS ARE BEGINNING TO LIMIT FAMILY SIZE FOR ECONOMIC REASONS. ACCORDING TO A SURVEY CONDUCTED IN 1970, THE FERTILITY RATE TAPERED SIGNIFICANTLY IN THE 1960'S, DROPPING FROM 42 PER THOUSAND IN 1960 TO 34 PER THOUSAND IN THE YEAR OF THE SURVEY. TRADITIONALLY, THE LEBANESE HAVE SOLVED THEIR POPULATION PROBLEM BY EMIGRATING. THERE ARE LARGE LEBANESE COLONIES IN WEST AFRICA, SOUTH AMERICA AND THE UNITED STATES. THE FIGHTING IN 1975-76 KILLED 20-25,000 PERSONS AND CREATED 700,000 EMIGRANT REFUGEES, SOME 300,000 OF WHOM ARE BELIEVED TO REMAIN ABROAD. LEBANON THUS FINDS ITSELF TODAY WITH A SMALLER RESIDENT POPULATION THAN IT HAD IN 1974. LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE, LEBANON AS A RELATIVELY WEALTHY, EUROPEAN-ORIENTED STATE MAY BE EXPECTED TO SHOW THE BENEFICIAL EFFECTS THAT A HIGH LIVING STANDARD AND AN OPEN CULTURE TRADITIONALLY HAVE UPON NATIONAL BIRTH RATES. FOR THE NEAR TERM, THE EMIGRATION OF MANY TECHNICIANS AND ADMINISTRATORS INHIBITS SOMEWHAT GOVERNMENT

EFFORTS TO IMPLEMENT POPULATION AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
PROGRAMS.

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